

The Curse of the House of HAPSBURG



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The Sisi of the Empress Elisabeth at Vienna

How the Fatal Curse Put Upon the Emperor Franz Joseph Has Swept His Loved Ones Away In a Tragic Manner - The Most Pathetic Figure in European History.

May Heaven and Hell blast your happiness; may your family be exterminated; may you be smitten in the persons of those you love best; may your children be brought to ruin and your life wrecked, and yet may you live on in lonely, unbroken, horrible grief, to tremble when you recall the name of Karolyi!

This was the curse pronounced on the Emperor Franz Joseph by the Countess Karolyi, whose son was put to death by order of the Emperor for participating in the Hungarian uprising. The Countess is said to have shrieked out her curse at the Emperor when he appeared at a State ball in Vienna.

"It will come to pass!" she cried as the attendants dragged her away. Surely her words were prophetic, for death has come to the Emperor's best loved relations in a most tragic manner. Today we find him tottering with old age, standing alone like some great tree which a storm has shorn of its branches.

"Nothing is spared me!" cries the venerable Head of the House of Hapsburg as he sits in his palace surrounded by every luxury which wealth can procure, the most pathetic figure in European history.

The recent assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, and his devoted wife by a nineteen-year-old fanatic Serbian adds another chapter to the long line of Hapsburg tragedies which have shocked the world during the past quarter of a century, and to the sympathy of the world goes out to the old man who has suffered almost beyond endurance.

Origin of Hapsburg House.

The House of Hapsburg has an interesting history—almost melodramatic in its romances, scandals and tragic deaths. Descendants of Rudolph of Hapsburg, a German Count, born in 1225, and elected King of the Romans in 1273, the royal family of Austria is among the oldest in Europe, for Count Rudolph in 1282 bestowed the duchy of Austria upon his son Albrecht, afterward Roman Emperor. About 1740 the male line of the family died out with Emperor Karl VI and his only daughter Maria Theresa married Duke Franz of Lorraine and Tuscany, who afterwards became Franz I of the House of Lorraine and the founder of the Hapsburg-Lorraine family. Maria Theresa was succeeded in 1780 by her son Joseph II, and afterwards his brother Leopold II came to the throne and died after a two years' reign. Leopold's son Franz followed and reigned until 1835. He was married four times and left a large number of descendants who form the present Imperial House. Franz I, as he called himself, was the first sovereign who assumed the title of Emperor or Kaiser of Austria, doing so after being compelled by Napoleon in 1806, to renounce the Imperial crown of Rome, which had been practically in the Hapsburg family for more than three centuries. Before this he had already coupled with his title of Emperor of the Romans that of Hereditary Emperor of Austria. He was succeeded by his son, Emperor Ferdinand I, on whose abdication on December 2nd, 1848, the crown came to his nephew, the present Emperor Franz Joseph I, who is known as the Emperor-King of Austria-Hungary. The international relations of these countries is called the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

It consists of two States—the Austrian Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom. The relations between the two are regulated by the so-called compromise of 1867, which makes Franz Joseph the common head of the two nations and known in Austria as Emperor and in Hungary as the Apostolic King. The present Emperor came to the throne in 1848, was crowned King of Hungary and took the

oath of the Hungarian Constitution June 8th, 1867. He was but eighteen years of age when his weak uncle, Ferdinand abdicated. The father of Franz Joseph, the Archduke Francis Charles, would have been the next in line, but the royal family preferred young "Franz," who had already made his mark as a student. Several times his mother, the Archduchess Sophie, had given him a hint of the honor which was to come to him and by her orders he received instructions in every branch of jurisprudence. He also became an expert shot and a fearless horseman. The Archduchess ruled the father as well as the son, and she knew that the father was totally unfit for the crown. She finally worried her husband into declaring that he had seen a vision while earnestly praying for guidance in the matter. He then told the Court that the spirit of his father, the late Emperor Francis, had appeared and laid his hand on the head of his youthful grandson, Franz Joseph. This decided the family and young Franz Joseph became the ruler.

Reigns Over A Mixed People.

Austria received him with frantic delight, and the day of his accession was one of joy throughout the land. The young Emperor even at that age had a remarkable conception of duty, which has served him well during his long and checkered reign. When first addressed as your Majesty, he turned pale and murmured "Farewell to my youth!" His foot was already on the thorny path which he has untiringly trodden for sixty-six years. During this time he has reigned over more than fifty million people consisting of Austrians, Hungarians, Bohemians, Serbians and Herzegovinians. They are his subjects, besides these a large number of Germans, Italians, Russians, Serbs, Roumanians, British, French, Montenegrins, Turkish, Serbian, Bulgarian, Leichtensteiners and over three thousands Americans live in his domain.

His troubles began early in his reign, as a few months after he came to the throne he was assailed by a conspiracy of the soldiers who were drilling nearby. Suddenly a man ran up the narrow steps leading to the bastion and dealt the Emperor a violent blow with a knife. The blow was aimed at the neck, but it struck a bone behind the ear and did not inflict a serious wound, although the concussion caused partial blindness for a time. The man proved to be a Hungarian named Lebenzi—a tailor by trade. He declared that he was determined to kill the Emperor and had waited for the opportunity for some time.

When the Emperor had fully recovered the people of Vienna, who have always shown a remarkable devotion to their ruler set about to build a church in commemoration of their youthful monarch's preservation, and the Volkirche, a masterpiece of modern Gothic art, was the result. This beautiful church rears its slender, graceful towers on one of the widest streets of the Austrian capital and is always an object of the greatest interest to the American traveler.

The Emperor was kindly disposed toward his subjects, even the Hungarian rebels, and tried to win them, but the Archduchess Sophie had formed the policy of his reign—a cruel, heartless policy which carried death and exile to many. She was heartily disliked by the people, and the



Picture Made at Schwanen Castle After the Wedding of the Archduke Charles Francis with the Princess Zita Nov 10th, 1911.

- (1) Archduke Franz Ferdinand
- (2) Archduchess Maria Josepha, Mother of Bridegroom
- (3) Emperor Franz Joseph
- (4 and 5) Bride and Groom



The Emperor Franz Joseph From a painting in the National Gallery at Vienna

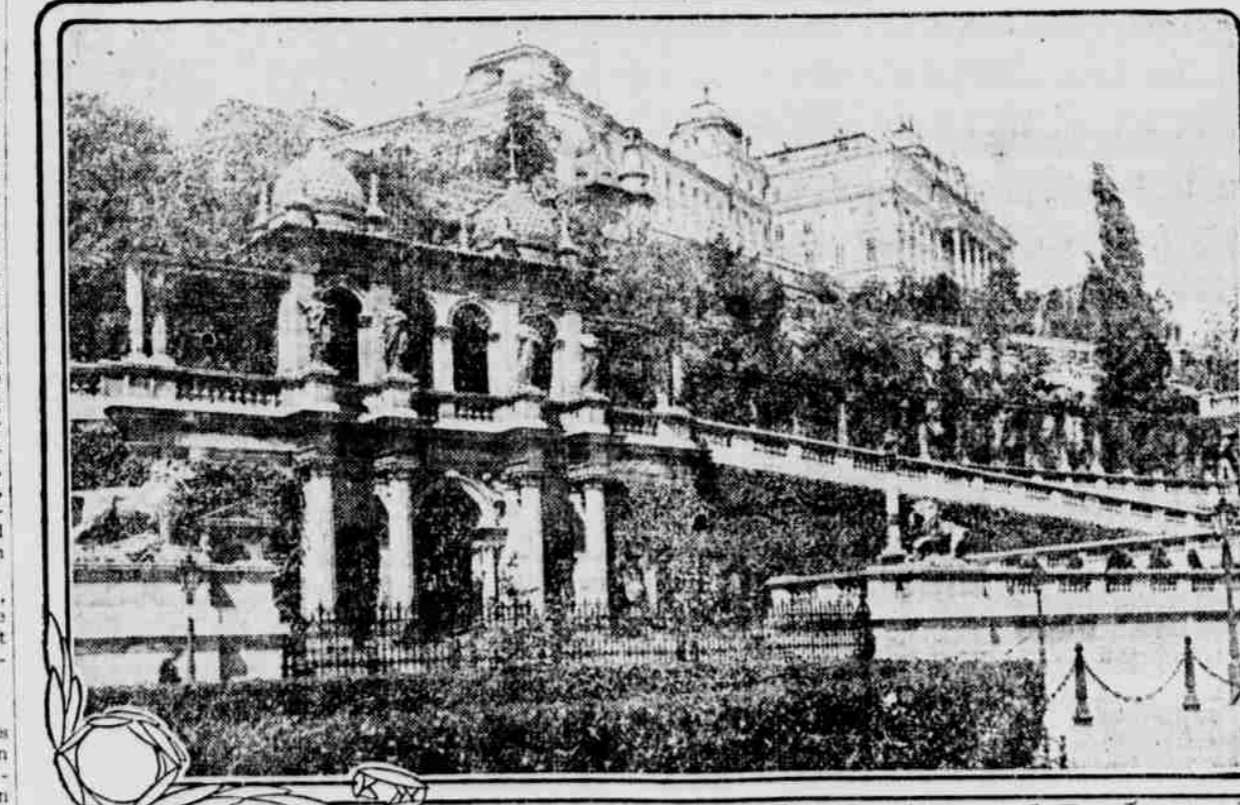
historians regard it almost a miracle that she was not assassinated during one of the Hungarian uprisings.

Maries Princess Elisabeth.

When "Franz," as she affectionately called her son, was about twenty-three, she set about to find him a wife, so she sent him on a courting expedition to the home of the Duke of Bavaria, who had married her younger sister. Among the daughters of the Duke was the Princess Helene, who was just nineteen, and the mother hoped that her son would fall in love with this princess, but she was destined to disappointment for he paid little attention to the Princess Helene and fell in love with her younger sister, the Princess Elisabeth, who was then only fifteen years of age. A year later they were married and the beautiful princess charmed all Austria and Hungary as well. She bore the name of the patron saint of the latter, and when she came with the Emperor to



The Emperor's Favorite Portrait of the Empress Elisabeth as She Appeared at the age of 25



Franz Josephs Palace at Budapest Where He is Known as the King of Hungary

Budapest the wildest enthusiasm prevailed. She studied their language and spoke it like a native. Even today she is known as the good angel of Hungary, and a special museum has been established where articles which at one time belonged to her are on exhibition. Of a naturally vivacious disposition the now Empress chafed under the restraint of Court etiquette and did a lot of unheard of things which shocked the Austrian royalty, but delighted the pleasure-loving Hungarians.

For a time the couple led an existence of unclouded happiness. Four children were born as the result of their union. The oldest, the little Archduchess Sophie, named for her grandmother, died of typhoid fever in early childhood. The disease was contracted from drinking water sent from a Vienna spring. In some way it became uncleaned and spoiled, but the nurse did not discover it until the child was taken ill.

The second child, the Archduchess Gisela, is now the Queen of Bavaria. The other two children were the Archduchess Marie Valerie, who became the wife of Franz Salvator, Archduke of Austria-Tuscany, and Prince Rudolph, the heir to the throne.

The Empress lost her health after the birth of the Crown Prince and had to spend much of her time away

from the Emperor at the different "spas" of Europe.

Then the Archduke Maximilian was persuaded to go to Mexico to rule over that restless land. He was urged to do this by his wife, the Empress Charlotte, and his mother, the Archduchess Sophie, the latter being most insistent in her demands—declaring that she wanted to be known as the mother of two Emperors. But the Curse of the Hapsburgs fell once more, for Maximilian was executed by the ungrateful Mexicans and his wife, the beautiful Empress Charlotte, ended her days in a mad house.

Death Of The Crown Prince.

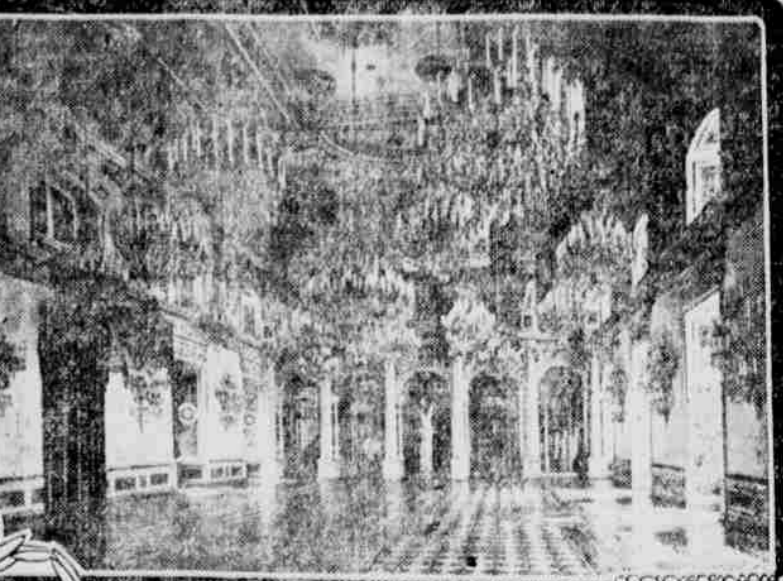
The hopes of the Emperor now became centered on the Crown Prince, who grew to manhood universally beloved by all his subjects. Always of a shy and retiring disposition, the young prince spent much of his time in shooting and became a taxidermist of no mean ability, mounting up the results of his shooting expeditions for the National Museum. He married the Princess Stephanie, the second daughter of King Leopold II, of Belgium. There seems to have been very little love in the matter for the Crown Prince seemed to have been infatuated with the Baroness Marie Vester. In 1889 the Crown Prince fell once more on the Hapsburgs, for the heir to the throne was found dead at his hunting lodge at

Meyerling not very far from Vienna. Beside him was the dead body of the Baroness. All sorts of rumors were afloat as to how the couple met death, and it was finally given out as suicide, but as suicide was so abhorrent to the Catholic Church the Empress refused to believe that her son had taken his life. However, no effort was made to find the murderer and the case is still known in Austria as "the Meyerling mystery."

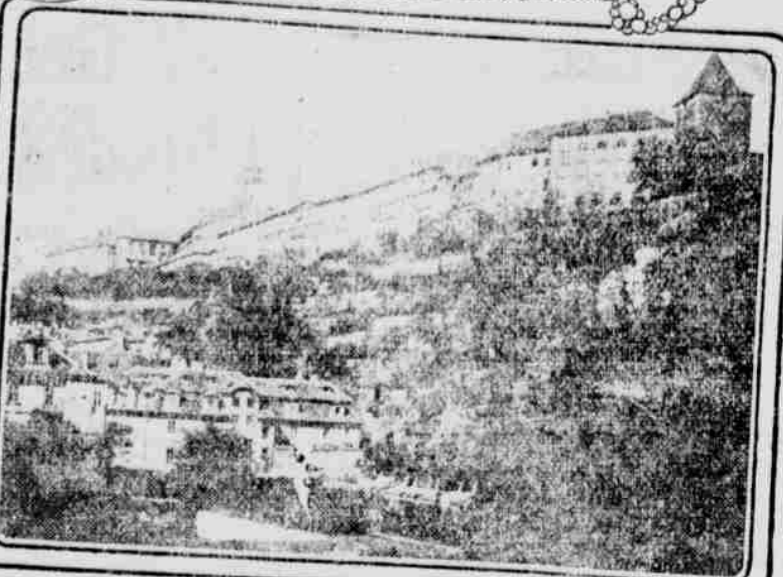
The death of the Crown Prince had an alarming effect on the Empress, who was devoted to her son. She never appeared at Court after his death, but wandered from place to place in her sorrow. The Emperor, who was always devoted to his wife, did all in his power to lift the veil of melancholy which seemed to envelope her, but without avail, and to use the language of a noted Hungarian writer: "The sorrowing woman in black wandered from country to country as though a dread shadow pursued her."

Empress Assassinated.

The Curse of the Hapsburgs was destined to claim her in its clutches, and this occurred while she was in Switzerland trying to recover health and strength to be present at the Emperor's Jubilee in 1898. Walking on the Quai de Mont Blanc in Geneva, accompanied only by her lady-in-waiting, the Countess Sotany, she was



The Audience Chamber of the Palace at Vienna



The Emperor's Palace in Prague, Bohemia



The Emperor Franz Joseph after the Attempt was Made to Assassinate him in 1888-From an Old Austrian Print

stabbed by an Italian anarchist, who used a sharpened shoe awl as a weapon—driving it into the heart of his victim. By a strange coincidence, it was very like the knife used years before when Franz Joseph's life was attempted. The dress worn by the Empress at the time of her death is one of the relics preserved at the Elizabeth Museum in Budapest. Only a tiny blood stain appears upon the gown, the Empress having died of internal hemorrhage.

This seemed to be the crowning sorrow of the many which had fallen upon the Emperor, and those who know him best declare that he has never been the same since the "Geneva tragedy." On the day of the funeral the Emperor instituted in memory of the Empress "The Order of Elizabeth" for women of all ranks who have devoted themselves to religious, humanitarian or charitable works or objects. The first Grand Cross was bestowed upon the Countess Sotany, who was with the Empress at the time of her death.

Other Sorrows.

But the trials of the Emperor were not over, for a few years later his favorite sister-in-law, the Duchess d'Alencon, lost her life in the great fire which swept over a charity bazaar in Paris and only a short time afterward one of his nieces was burned to death at the Palace of Schoenbrunn.

Then his granddaughter, the Princess Elisabeth, daughter of the dead Crown Prince fell in love with a young army officer of the House of Windesgratz, who was serving with a regiment quartered at Vienna. After a stormy scene with her grandfather she obtained his consent to marry the young man. The young man then became Prince Otto of Windesgratz, and on the day of the marriage the entire junior branch of the house to which the bridegroom belonged was given the rank of "Serene Highness." But even this marriage was destined to bring disgrace, for only a short time after the wedding the Archduchess fired a shot at an actress of whom she was jealous. Her mother, the Princess Stephanie, in the meantime had created a scandal at Court by marrying Count Louvay and had caused the Emperor no little humiliation by her extraordinary behavior at Court.

The Emperor's grandchild, Princess Louise, of Tuscany, astounded both Vienna and Paris by the life which she led and when reprimanded for it flaunted her escapades in the face of the royal family by publishing a sensational account of her mad career. Still another granddaughter was destined to bring sorrow to the venerable Head of the Hapsburgs when she eloped with an army officer and lived with him for some time before her family forced her to marry him. The Archduchess Louise was the next to create a scandal, for she deserted her husband for a music teacher.

Archdukes Cause Scandals.

The male members of the family, too, added grief to the declining years of the Emperor. The Archduke Leopold after a career of debauchery married a second rate actress and was deprived of his titles and exiled. Archduke Louis Victor, another brother who was known as the greatest roue in Europe, had to be confined in an insane asylum. Archduke Otto was dismissed from the army owing to a scandal which he had caused, and the Archduke Ladislaus was killed while on a hunting expedition by a peasant in what

revenge for cruelty practiced by him on this class.

Francis Ferdinand Marries Beneath Him.

Even the man who up to a short time ago was the heir to the throne, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, caused the Emperor no little trouble. This young man paid a visit to the home of the Archduchess Isabella, who expected him to marry her daughter. Among her ladies-in-waiting was Sophie Chotek, a young Bohemian of good family. The Archduke was at once smitten by the charms of the beautiful girl and he determined to marry her. When the Archduke made her his wife, the Emperor's anger was kindled. The Archduke returned to Vienna and announced his intention of marrying the pretty Bohemian, to his uncle, the Emperor. There was a long stormy scene at the palace, but in the end the Archduke won, but only after he had made an oath that children by this marriage should not inherit the throne. The wedding took place very quietly—not even the bridegroom's brother being present. However, it turned out happily, and three children were born to the couple. In the meantime, the daughter of the Archduchess Isabella—the young girl who had "bet her cap" for the heir to the throne entered a convent much to the sorrow of her family. On learning this the old Emperor is said to have declared that although he ruled a mighty nation he was not master of his own house.

After a time, however, the charming manners of the wife of the lonely ruler and he conferred upon her the title of the Duchess of Hohenberg. She had great influence with her husband and was gradually changing his policy, but before he was able to put her theories into practice the Curse of the House of Hapsburg fell—the husband and wife were shot to death in Bosnia, the little country which had fallen a prey to the Austrian land-grabbing propensities.

"Sophie, live for our children," were the Archduke's last words, as he sank back against the cushions of the carriage dying. But the Duchess never heard, for she became unconscious after the first shot.

The children had remained at Schoenbrunn with the Emperor while their parents were paying their official visit to Bosnia and were playing in the garden beside him when the news of the assassination reached the palace. The heart-broken ruler was said to have gathered them in his arms and told them of the awful fate of their devoted father and mother.

New Heir Popular.

This makes the Archduke Charles Francis, the younger brother of Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the throne. This young man who is but twenty-seven years of age has always been a favorite with the Emperor and is immensely popular throughout Austria and Hungary. His tastes are democratic, and he is said to be as mild and ingratiating as his uncle is stern and forbidding. Then, too, he is happily married to the Princess Zita of Parma, and their children may inherit and thus the House of Hapsburg may be preserved.

The Emperor Franz Joseph in the course of nature cannot live much longer. Will the terrible Karolyi Curse, which has so relentlessly pursued the Hapsburgs, have spent its force at his death?